

Istook and Bishop Introduce Pledge and Prayer Amendment

Washington, DC -- Today, Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) and Sanford Bishop (D-GA) together with 88 other original co-sponsors introduced H.J. Res 46, the Pledge and Prayer Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The amendment would protect freedom of expression while avoiding the establishment of an official religion.

“It’s important to keep the words ‘One nation under God’ in the Pledge. Those words bind us to America’s Founding Fathers, who believed our rights come from God, not from the state,” said Rep. Istook, the principal author of the amendment. **“The right to pray should not evaporate at the schoolhouse door. Those who don’t want to pray don’t have to, but they should not try to silence those who want to pray.”**

Bishop, the lead Democratic cosponsor, said, **“Rarely have we needed the strength and guidance that Americans have historically gained from prayer and other forms of religious expression more than we do right now, and our amendment to protect and clarify the much-challenged right to express our religious convictions is needed more than ever.”**

The proposed constitutional amendment would permit but not mandate prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and display of the Ten Commandments on public property, including schools. The 9th Circuit Court recently ruled that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional and cannot be recited in public schools. Istook condemned that court ruling and says it’s another reason why Congress should approve his amendment.

“We can’t stay silent and accept decisions like this. This is the right way to set the courts straight, and stop them from trampling our rights,” said Istook.

The proposed text of the amendment (58 words) reads:

“To secure the people’s right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience:

--The people retain the right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, and traditions on public property, including schools.

--The United States and the States shall not establish any official religion nor require any person to join in prayer or religious activity.”

Istook has introduced a similar amendment since 1995; he says the new version is simpler than earlier efforts. In 1998, a broader version received a majority vote, but did not garner the necessary 2/3rds required for a constitutional amendment. A constitutional amendment must pass the House and Senate by a two-thirds vote, and then be ratified by three-fourths of the states. No approval by the President is necessary.